DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 258 414 EC 172 934

AUTHOR Mallory, Bruce L.
TITLE The Preparation of Early Childhood Special Educators for Rural and Urban Settings.
PUB DATE Mar 85
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual National Rural Special Education Conference (5th, Bellingham, WA, March 19-22, 1985). Contained in Proceedings document, see EC 172 933.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Course Content; *Disabilities; Early Childhood Education; Rural Education; *Special Education Teachers; *Teacher Education; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *University of New Hampshire

ABSTRACT

The paper describes the background and implementation of the University of New Hampshire's program to train masters level early childhood special educators for rural and urban settings. The program features child development theory, methods of assessment and teaching, and collaboration with parents and other professionals. Ecological perspectives and transdisciplinary roles are advocated for effectiveness in both rural and urban settings. Understanding of urban and rural settings extends to different views toward higher identification and service rates, resistance to change and external demands, and attitudes of families with handicapped children toward formal helping systems. (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED258414

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy

THE PREPARATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATORS FOR RURAL AND URBAN SETTINGS

Bruce L. Mallory, Ph.D.
University of New Hampshire

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Bruce L Mallory
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EC172934

Presented at the Fifth Annual National Rural Special Education Conference, American Council on Rural Special Education, Bellingham, Washington, March, 1985.

THE PREPARATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATORS FOR RURAL AND URBAN SETTINGS

Bruce L. Mallory, Ph.D.

In 1980, the University of New Hampshire received a three-year personnel preparation grant from the U. S. Education Department to develop a model training program for masters level Early Childhood Special Educators. The graduate program, now completing its fifth year, prepares specialists competent to work with young handicapped children (infants through primary level) and their families. Students are prepared to work in a variety of public and private settings, in homes, classrooms, clinics, and bureaucratic systems, and in a variety of roles as teachers, diagnosticians, multidisciplinary team members, parent support specialists, administrators, case managers, policy-makers, etc. Coursework and internship experiences emphasize both urban and rural circumstances, reflecting the traditional and changing characteristics of the nothern New England region.

The primary philosophical bases of the program are that 1) Early Childhood Special Educators must be thoroughly competent in understanding normal growth and development of children from birth to eight years old; 2) that understanding should include the ability to apply principles of cognitive-developmental psychology (e.g. Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972) to children experiencing irregular patterns of early development; 3) the application of any theoretical or technical intervention strategies must be based on the ecological perspective of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); and 4) the most critical component of any child's ecosystem is his/her immediate and extended family. This orientation results in a heavy emphasis on early

childhood development from an interactional, experiential frame of reference (e.g. Brunner, 1973; Dewey 1938). In addition, students are expected to master child-directed teaching skills as well as family-directed support skills. Students are also expected to understand how bureaucratic systems at the local, state and federal level hinder or enhance human development, and how to effect progressive change in those systems.

This paper will examine the ways in which the program accomplishes these demanding aspirations. Specifically, the preparation of Early Childhood Special Educators to be effective teachers and agents of change in both rural and urban environments will be discussed. Our goal is to prepare specialists capable of working successfully in either type of community.

Specific Areas of Competency

The curriculum of the Early Childhood Special Needs program has been described previously (Mallory, 1983). Essentially, we prepare what Stedman (1973) has described as developmental educators. These are individuals who are competent in child development theory, methods of educating young children, assessing young children and converting assessment results into individual educational goals and strategies, seeking and utilizing empirical research information, understanding the interrelatedness of cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development, supporting and assisting parents, collaborating with other professionals and agencies (including through multidisciplinary team participation), and taking an active role in organizational and community change leading to improved development of the child and family. These skills are acquired through

coursework and a one year internship. Figure 1 (adapted from Stedman, 1973) indicates the areas of competency of our graduates. The inner circle represents the strong emphasis on the supervised internship complemented by courses and seminars. The relative importance of the various competencies is indicated by the space allocated to each slice of the pie.

These competencies are consistent with the philosophical foundations of the program described earlier. For example, the ecological perspective is emphasized in coursework, and students with prior teaching experience may choose an internship experience which allows them to practice "liaison" skills as case managers, program administrators, or home-school coordinators. The liaison role is based on the model developed by Hobbs in project Re-ED (1966, 1982). This is a particularly useful role in rural areas where services may be widely dispersed, catchment areas may not overlap across various agencies, and personnel shortages may result in neglect of collaborative linkages due to overwhelming direct treatment responsibilities with limited administrative support. In a related vein, specialists working in rural areas must have a thorough knowledge of normal and abnormal child growth and development, including the interrelatedness of development. Because of the scarcity of physical, occupational, and speech therapists in rural communities, the Early Childhood Special Educator must be prepared to assume a trandisciplinary role (Allen, Holm, & Schiefelbusch, 1978) in meeting children's multiple needs.

Both of these examples are also applicable to urban settings, where liaison skills are important to coordinate multiple service systems, each with a narrow role and function. Likewise, transdisciplinary skills are useful for interacting with therapists and introducing therapeutic techniques into preschool classrooms. Thus, although the program emphasizes

skills necessary for effective work in rural communities, these same skills are clearly useful in urban areas where the basic needs of children and their families are essentially the same.

The necessity of a broad base of transdisciplinary, ecologically-oriented skills becomes apparent when our interns are placed in both urban and rural agencies. One intern worked in a major urban teaching hospital and then returned to New Hampshire to establish rural developmental assessment clinics. The urban hospital experience provided her with a model of team functioning and assessment that she could adapt to the rural clinics. Another student spent her internship establishing a rural preschool special education program where she was the head teacher, administrator, parent coordinator, therapist, and janitor. Subsequently she moved to a well-established, multi-classroom program in a small city where her role was much narrower and she had administrative and therapeutic backup. Her initial experiences allowed her to better understand the particular constraints and perspectives of her colleagues in the larger setting. Another intern did just the opposite. She started out in an urban program and then moved into a rural integrated kindergarten setting in the second semester of internship. Her first experience provided her with strong collaboration skills and exposed her to the practices of a variety of professionals. Her new placement required that she introduce collaboration and therapeutic techniques into a more heterogeneous setting where both the regular staff and normal children had not previously experienced the integration of severely handicapped children.

How differences Between Rural and Urban Communities Affect Personnel Preparation

One way of distinguishing between what Matthews (1966) calls rural communities and urban societies (an interesting distinction itself) is to use Parsons' (1951) typology of communities. The four types he identified include universalistic-achievement, universalistic-ascriptive, particularistic-achievement, and particularistic-ascriptive. The first two types, in which behavioral expectations are normative and universal (i.e. apply to all members of the society), and found in urban areas. That is, there are highly prescribed standards of behavior that are used to identify and separate those who deviate from those standards. This results in a high level of utilization of formal social services to "correct" deviant behavior in order to bring it closer to the universal standards. Concern is with group conformity rather than the assertion of individual idio-syncratic values.

Particularistic communities, on the other hand, emphasize and tolerate individual differences, and judge the value of the individual as a whole rather than the degree to which he/she is capable of performing specific functions within specific contexts. In other words, more deviant behavior (or development) is tolerated because value lies with the person, not with the power, skills, or knowledge that person has acquired. The result is that community goals focus on stability, equalization of life chances among members, and rejection of heirarchical power structures. Value is placed on expressive rather than instrumental roles. This kind of social system is found in a very homogeneous population due to its tight stable structure. There is relatively little divergence of value systems, familial patterns, ethnicity, or occupational status. Such characteristics

and goals tend to inhibit social change, particularly if it is introduced by external elements. These characteristics are similar to Ford's (1962) catalogue of rural traits that include individualism and self-reliance, traditionalism, familialism, fundamentalism, and fatalism. Looff's (1971) list includes these same traits, and adds action-orientation, stoicism, and person-orientation. Gerrard (1971) uses the term "anti-state orientation" to describe the effect of these characteristics in terms of expressed values concerning external authority.

There is ample support for these theoretical perspectives in the area of special education practice. Three phenomena relevant here are the prevalence and identification of handicapping conditions, response to externally imposed charge, and attitudes toward formal helping systems. The relationship of each of these to the preparation of Early Childhood Special Educators will be discussed briefly.

Prevalence rates for non-organic mental retardation (a socially defined attribute) are significantly higher in rural communities compared to urban areas when psychometric criteria are applied (Albizu-Miranda, 1966; Lemkau & Imre, 1969). However, actual identification rates for determining eligibility for special education services are much lower in rural areas. Although traditional estimates indicate that 10 percent of school-age children are educationally handicapped, rural states have reported far fewer handicapped children receiving services under PL 94-142. New Hampshire, as well as states in the deep south and the far west, are below the national averages for identified children in the 3-5 and 6-18 year old age ranges. The lowest rates of identification of 3-5 year olds are found in New Hampshire, Mississippi, Alabama, New Mexico and Hawaii.

The lowest rates of identification for all children (3-21) are found in New Hampshire, New York (a predominantely rural state), South Dakota, Washington, and Hawaii. These states all identified less than one percent of the preschool population and less than 7.4 percent of the school-age population as handicapped.

The implication of these discrepancies for teacher preparation is important. Early Childhood Special Educators (and others) must recognize that psychometric approaches to identification and labeling may be viewed quite differently in urban vs. rural settings. In the achievement-oriented, normative context of urban or suburban communities, higher identification and service rates may not be viewed as problematic. Those children who fail to meet community standards for pre-academic or academic competence should be located, isolated, and treated in order to remediate their deficits and maintain their chances for academic and later economic success, according to this urban value system. In rural communities, where more modest aspirations and expectations hold sway, and where there is greater acceptance of irregular development and more resistance to labeling children as deviant, lower service rates can be anticipated. Interns or recent graduates who are not indigeneous to these communities must be prepared to adapt to these varying perspectives. And they must understand that their natural urges to introduce reform in traditional, rural communities will be tempered by the prevailing value system. Even the introduction of mandated programs such as Child Find may not be well received in light of these values. An understanding of ecological factors and the principles of community change thus becomes very important.

The second factor affecting the preparation of Early Childhood Special Educators relates to what Helge (1981) refers to as suspicion of external (federal and state) interference. Externally imposed mandates are viewed as threats to self-determination. This view is related to a more general resistance to change. There is evidence that rural school board members, in particular, are resistant to innovation in educational practices, while superintendents may be more open to new ideas (Gehlen, 1969). Schools are viewed as institutions of stability and cultural transmission, where long-held values related to family, education, moral behavior, and community are to be preserved and protected. The urban notion that schools may be vehicles for solving broader social ills such as racial segregation or the lack of child care is not supported in rural communities. However, these differences are not purely ideological. The lack of economic resources, especially an adequate local tax base, requires a more conservative view of the role of schools as agents of change. And resistance to external mandates is partially rooted in the recognition that federal and state laws rarely provide sufficient financial resources to fully implement those laws. (Voters in New Hampshire recently amended the state constitution to prohibit any new state mandates that were not fully funded with state dollars.)

Resistance to change, especially when it is imposed by external forces, has a direct effect on Early Childhood Special Educators. Because their roles and tasks are in many ways prescribed by state and federal law, they may be viewed as agents of the state rather than as partners of the community. The introduction of new efforts to identify young children as

educationally handicapped, demands for lower child-staff ratios, requests for expensive therapeutic equipment and classroom materials, development of complicated and time-consuming record-keeping systems, close scrutiny of each child's deficits and strengths, an emphasis on individual development rather than group cohesion and cultural transmission, requests for building renovations necessary for physical accessability, the introduction of formal, center-based education at an early age, and the transformation of parents into active decision makers rather than passive supporters are all tasks that the Early Childhood Special Educator is taught to carry out, and is ethically and legally required to do so. When that individual is not indigenous, and has not had experience in other rural communities, he or she will find the going rough. And the lack of support personnel and sympathetic, knowledgeable administrators or school board members makes the process all the more difficult.

This implies the need to equip the new practitioner with both technical/clinical skills related to child development and special education and personal attributes such as a strong self-concept, sensitivity to the values of others, the ability to articulate his/her beliefs in non-technical and non-threatening language, the ability to work with community groups in a deliberate, respectful manner, and an understanding of the processes of organizational and community development. Again, these skills and attributes are focussed on rural circumstances, but we find them equally valuable in urban areas where pluralistic groups and financial constraints create similar needs and problems.

The final issue affecting graduate training is the attitude of families with handicapped children toward formal helping systems such as

schools, health care agencies, mental health centers, or welfare systems. This issue is closely related to the previous one in that attitudes concerning self-reliance, group cohesion, and externally imposed change also affect the degree of use of formal services. Given the preference to rely on kinship networks for assistance rather than professionals or bureaucracies (Looff, 1971; Matthews, 1966), Early Childhood Special Educators need to work within a family-oriented, ecological framework rather than from a purely child-oriented, clinical perspective. Rural families may be characterized as less transient than urban families; multiple generations of the same family remain in close proximity over the family's life cycle. This may not always be beneficial from the practitioners' (or parents') point of view. Extended family members may have difficulty accepting the presence of a handicapped child or they may offer advice based on traditional folklore rather than contemporary knowledge. However, the availability of a natural support network is generally a strength. The specialist has an obligation to utilize that network; that may entail educating family members about the child's disability and assets, incorporating relatives as respite care providers or home teachers, or encouraging these people to assist the child's parents with domestic tasks. In addition, the specialist needs to determine the psychological and emotional climate of the network to determine the extent of problematic reactions such as blaming in-laws for a child's condition or suggesting outdated options (placing the child in an institution or relying on unproven medical practices). The specialist must be aware that he/she may be perceived as an intruder in the family network rather than as a helper.

The community organization principles of respect for existing beliefs and practices, incremental change, and the establishment of trust can also apply to the process of family change and adaptation. It should be noted that the presence of extended family networks and suspicion of bureaucratic systems also is a characteristic of minority urban groups (Stack, 1974). Similar strategies may therefore be required in these diverse circumstances.

Conclusion

Several principles for preparing Early Childhood Special Educators to work in rural and urban settings have been discussed. Common and divergent characteristics of rural and urban environments have been described to suggest approaches to course content and field internships. Multiple roles and skills for a "developmental educator" have been proposed, with a dual emphasis on child oriented competencies and family/community oriented competencies. The application of those roles and skills in rural communities with particular characteristics has been described, with some reference to their application in urban contexts.

At this point, two cautions are in order. First, the literature describing the characteristics and value systems of rural (and urban) communities has not changed as rapidly as the communities have. The effects of media, rapid transportation, and more uniform educational curricula on the urbanization of rural areas has not been well documented. Although the discussion in this paper and elsewhere may give the impression that rural communities are uniformly conservative and static, that is certainly not the case. Many factors will determine how "rural" a community is, such as its economic condition, proximity to urban areas and

major highways, geographic location (e.g. isolated by mountains), rate of population growth or decline, and the attitude of school administrators toward innovation (including special education mandates). Students being prepared to work in rural communities must understand the dynamic nature of any region and be able to adapt themselves to changing values and practices.

Second, many of the differences between rural and urban settings mentioned here and in other sources are confounded by socioeconomic factors. It may be that socioeconomic differences play a larger role in the development of attitudes and values than geographic locale. Farber (1968), among others, has described the different ways in which income, social class, and religious affiliation affect families' responses to having a handicapped child. To the extent that rural families are economically disadvantaged, the characterizations presented here may be valid. And urban families with low-income, minority status may share many of the attributes of low-income rural families. This would imply that special educators and other professionals must address needs related to social class and social group membership as well as type of community. In the end, we want such people to be sensitive, observant, humble, tolerant and caring. These are the most important qualities, and the most difficult ones to impart.

REFERENCES

Albizu-Miranda, C. 1966. The successful retardate. Puerto Rican Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Hato Rey, Puerto Rico.

Allen, K. E., Holm, V. A., & Schiefelbusch, R. L. (Eds.). 1978. Early intervention: A team approach. Baltimore: University Park Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. 1979. The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. S. 1973. The relevance of education. New York: W. W. Norton.

Dewey, J. 1938. Experience and education. New York: MacMillan

Farber, B. 1968. Mental retardation: Its social context and social consequences. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Ford, T. R. (Ed). 1962. The southern appalachian region: A survey. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.

Gehlen, F. L. 1969. The political aspects of small towns and rural schools. New Mexico State University, University Park, New Mexico.

Gerrard, N. L. 1971. Churches of the stationary poor in southern Appalachia. In J. D. Photiadis & H. K. Schwarzweller (Eds.). Change in rural Appalachia: Implications for action programs. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Helge, D. I. 1981. Problems in implementing comprehensive special education programming in rural areas. Exceptional Children. 47, 514-520.

Hobbs, N. 1966. Helping disturbed children: Ecological and psychological strategies. American Psychologist. 21, 1105-1115.

Hobbs, N. 1982. The troubled and troubling child: Reeducation in mental health, education, and human service programs for children and youth. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kohlberg, L. & Mayer, R. 1972. Development as the aim of education. Harvard Education Review, 42, 449-496.

Lemkau, P. V. & Imre, P. D. 1969. Results of a field epidemiologic study. American Journal of Mental Deficiency. 73, 858-863.

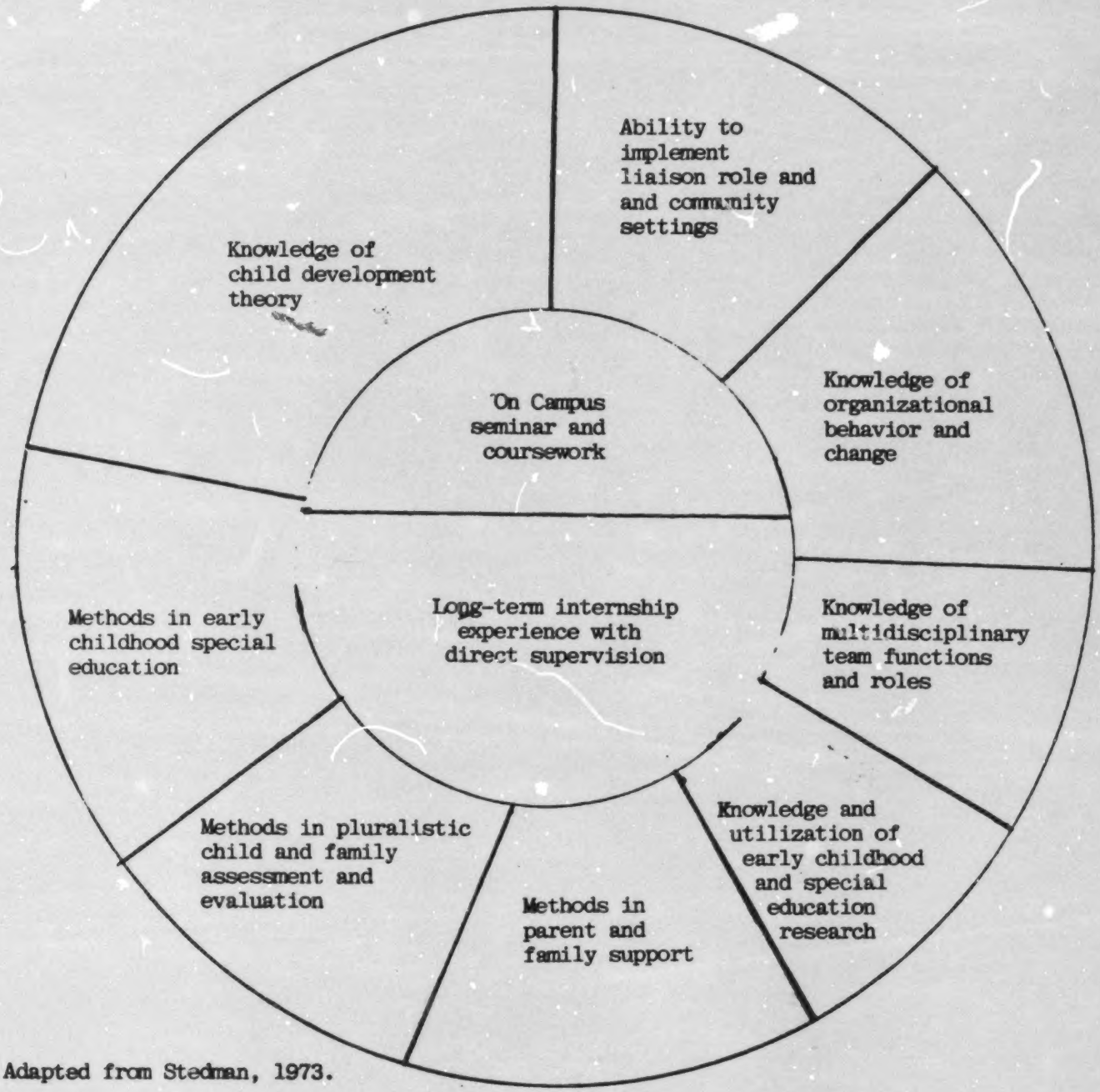
Looff, D. H. 1971. Appalachia's children: The challenge of mental health. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.

Mallory, B. L. 1983. The preparation of early childhood special educators: A model program. Journal for the Division of Early Childhood. 7, 32-40.

Matthews, E. M. 1966. Neighbor and kin. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Stack, C. B. 1974. All our kin. New York: Harper and Row.

Stedman, D. J. 1973. Training: The need for getting it all together. In J. B. Jordan & R. F. Dailey (Eds.). Not all little wagon are red: The exceptional child's early years. Arlington, VA: Council for Exceptional children.


Knowledge of child development theory
Ability to implement liaison role and and community settings
Knowledge of organizational behavior and change
On Campus seminar and coursework
Long-term internship experience with direct supervision
Knowledge of multidisciplinary team functions and roles
Methods in early childhood special education
Methods in pluralistic child and family assessment and evaluation
Methods in parent and family support
Knowledge and utilization of early childhood and special education research

Adapted from Stedman, 1973.

FIGURE I

Competency Areas